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A LOOK AT OTHERS: MINORITY GROUPS
AND POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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During the past three years, it has been my enriching experience and privilege to talk with approximately 3000 law enforcement officers of state and municipal police forces in my state of New Jersey. They have represented all ranks from the best patrolman and highway trooper, to inspector and chief. They have come from the countryside of the farm belt, from the small town and from the large city. Almost without exception, at first, they came with very pronounced suspicions, and feelings that any discussion of minority group problems was going to be so much tripe, or some kind of brainwashing experiment to which they would be exposed. However, I think it is safe to say that in every one of the institutes or courses that had been undertaken, most of these officers went away much more thoughtful and questioning; much less suspicious and skeptical, than had been their initial reactions. An explanation could be that they had had an opportunity to measure the honesty and sincerity of the presentation in each instance; to question and probe as deeply as they wished; to hold up for examination to themselves, their own feelings and opinions; and to apply the yardstick of fairplay which motivates the vast majority of law enforcement officers, in the contemplation of their exacting duties. It is within the framework of such combination of

factors that objective discussion of the problems of Human Relations will invariably bring greater understanding.

There basically are two practical reasons for the promotion of such institutes, and for engaging in this free, searching type of exchange of information and views. First is the short range, immediate, and in some places in the country, almost critical need for attention. The climate created by international tensions and domestic intergroup frictions, is making it increasingly necessary that community leadership be sensitive to the subtle manifestations of these tensions, as a means of preventing and controlling disorder and conflict. One of the most feared nightmares of the American community is RIOF - an evil, brutal, costly thing with long-lasting aftermath. It has been proven that it is not a spontaneous phenomenon. Invariably it is preceded by observable signs, if there be sufficient sensitivity, alertness, understanding and concern through which these signs may be greeted by preventive action. The state of social health in the community is measurable to a degree similar to our ability to diagnose the health of a human being. We are taught, in programs of health protection, to check persistent headaches or other pains, shortness of breath, dizziness, and so forth, if we would prevent more serious manifestations later.

The second basic reason for our presence in such institutes is that of pursuing the quest for knowledge and understanding that will bring law enforcement officers closer to the desirable goal of Professional status. This status implies something considerably more than just a Job, for which one draws wages for certain hours of directed activity; the term signifies that one's calling is a guarantee of dedicated purpose, of constantly accumulating knowledge, and of a technical proficiency which is possible only through such dedication and accumulation of knowledge.

One of the principle roadblocks to the acquisition of knowledge, is the constant temptation to oversimplify, when considering an issue or problem. Particularly is this true when our subject is Human Nature, one of the most unpredictable and variable elements in creation. In this process of oversimplification, is it not true that many or most of us fall into the habit of dividing the human family into two major groups - "WE", meaning our kind, and "THEY", meaning all others? The "WE" group to which we may refer may be the large, racial group which shares our skin color; or it may be reduced in size and exclusiveness by such limitations as language group, nationality allegiance, religious persuasion, or even occupational choice. "THEY" will fit into any framework which signifies difference or separation from the "WE" group. In the same sense that "WE" share many virtues in common, "THEY" can be identified by the unfavorable qualities attributed to them, which serve to justify the different and separate status to which we have assigned them.

By this process of simplification of a complex situation, our human relations decisions are made easier, and our consciences less troublesome, when entire groups of people can be fitted neatly into simple categories that we refer to as stereotypes. For instance, how many of us unconsciously class Orientals as sly; Mexicans as villainous; Puerto Ricans as dirty and uncontrollable; Negroes as shiftless and sex-crazy; Jews as dishonest; Irish as drunkards; Germans as pigheaded and belligerent; Italians as grafters and racketeers. Are we, as law enforcement officers, inclined to class social workers as fuzzy-minded "do-gooders", and do we resent their frequent characterization of police as thick-headed and brutal? These thoughtless tendencies to create stereotypes in the human family become troublesome, when feelings or opinions begin to find expression in our relations with other people. Persons whom we classify as being like ourselves - the "WE"

group - will vary in our esteem from those for whom we have deep and abiding affection on the one extreme, to those for whom we have contempt and intense dislike, on the other. But, we will love or dislike these people as individuals, and for what they personally have contributed to the relationship. The people whom we have placed in the "THEY" category are judged as a single entity, by the lowest common denominator of our experiences with members of the group, and by the emotional climate existing in our community. This climate, in turn, is influenced by the following six factors by which the role of a minority in the community is determined:

1. Ease of identification of members of the group enables us to pick them out of the crowd on sight, or through very casual contact. At some one period in our national history, the German, the Irish, the several Eastern European groups, and others, were in this easily identified out-group. The loss of an accent in speaking, the shedding of old world habits, dress and customs, or their removal from the ethnic ghetto, made it more difficult to identify them as members of the out-group. There are the others, of course, like the Negro or Oriental, who retain their badge of identification over many generations.
2. The out-group is defined by the slowness with which it is assimilated in the total population; or, shall we say, the number of years or generations that the group's "difference" persists in the public mind.
3. The minority group's identity is fixed by the degree to which it exists in such numerical strength in a community that they irritate just by constant presence.

4. Their numbers and their demands for recognition, place them in position of threatening our notions of our own socially superior status, our prior claim to desirable jobs, and our unchallenged control of political affairs of community and state.
5. The intensity of our reaction to them can be measured by what may be defined as the emotional history of contact between our respective groups, flowing out of labor strikes, teen-age gang outbursts, over-publicized and sensationalized crimes of violence involving minority group members, or even such longer range influences as a carry-over of old world conflicts, and political tragedies like our own Reconstruction period misfortunes.
6. The minority group in our community is marked by the number and kind of rumors which are handled about, emphasizing either the criminality, sexual depravity, or diabolical design upon us, which are supposed to characterize the group under discussion. Rumors of this sort have been known to set off race riots costing many lives.

Any combination of these test criteria will disclose the groups in our community who may be classified as "the minorities", and about whom this discussion is centered.

Three persistent questions arise in every discussion of minority group problems with police officers. "Why are _____ such odd-balls and trouble-makers?" Another: "Why don't they do something to better themselves?" and, "Why do they always cry "discrimination" whenever they are in trouble?" It is true that these questions are raised by others than Police, but never as persistently and with as deep feeling. There are at least two reasons for police obsession with these questions, the first of these being the inescapable fact that

law enforcement officers spend most of their waking hours dealing with the weak, troublesome, maladjusted, frustrated members of society who, secondly, are represented disproportionately by members of minority groups. Does this disproportion signify an inherent racial or ethnic inferiority? Or, is it a product of environment and living experiences? The thoughtless, the intellectually lazy, the emotionally insecure and the misinformed persons will insist that it is the former reason; science, and the experience of practitioners in the field of human relations, declare it to be the latter. Open-minded individuals will be curious and fair-minded enough to explore both opinions.

Implicit in the six criteria outlined above, as means of identifying the minorities in our communities, is the demonstrated fact that they are forced to accept different treatment -- in their pursuit of education, quest of work, of living quarters, of recreational outlet. To be denied the right of earning a livelihood for one's family, or to be deprived arbitrarily and capriciously of any of these basic needs, for no other reason than the accident of birth, produces a kind of emotional shock that in turn creates a deep, smoldering rage which arises out of blind, helpless frustration. Such emotions are intensified when one's children are made the victims of intolerance, whether at school or at play. But, America's easily identified minorities are exposed daily to these experiences, in every section of our great, rich, free country.

For instance, in 1936, in the depths of the Depression when employment on any level was highly competitive, a study was made in New Jersey to determine the degree to which a single minority was numbered among the employed population. In the study of nearly 2000 businesses in the state, it was found that 55% of them were not hiring Negro workers in any capacity; not even in the menial jobs. The 45% who did hire one or more Negroes, with but few exceptions, confined them to the

distasteful and low-paying work assignments. Although representing but 5.5% of the state's population, this minority constituted 25% of the relief load, costing the state an estimated \$28 million per year for subsistence. Since the enactment of Fair Employment Practices law in this state in 1945, this condition has improved immeasurably, but the agency administering the law can cite some shocking statistics and case histories as to the prevalence of employment discrimination even in these days of prosperity, high employment and widespread labor organization, nearly a quarter of a century later.

It may be indicative of the seriousness of discriminatory practices when I tell you that in 1958, 38% of all employment complaints brought to the Division against Discrimination in New Jersey were found to be justified complaints - that is, that 38 of every 100 situations reported exposed employers and union officials who were permitting their prejudices against identifiable minority group persons, to deprive those persons of the basic right to earn a livelihood. Records also disclose that 82 of every 100 complaints made against restaurants, taverns, bowling alleys, skating rinks, etc., were actual incidents in which the accident of birth was considered cause enough to deprive the individual of citizenship rights. In public schools and in all levels of housing, hundreds of thousands of American citizens are being exposed to the humiliating and maddening experience of being turned away because of what others consider to be their stupidity in choosing the kind of parents they did. To several of America's easily identified minorities, such embarrassments accompany them from their first play experiences in early childhood, to the final act of interment in the cemetery burial plot.

Constant exposure to such experience develops in many members of minority groups a lack of assurance, an uncertainty, suspicion, anxiety, anger. Nerve ends

become hyper-sensitive; emotional scars are inflicted upon personality. The American Youth Commission was responsible in the early forties, for a series of studies bearing upon these reactions. The reports entitled "Color, Class and Personality" by Warner, Junker and Adams⁽¹⁾, and "Color and Human Nature" by Sutherland⁽¹⁾ were among the first serious attempts to measure the effect of such experience. More recently, two psychiatrists, Drs. Kardiner and Ovesey, have published their significant analyses of case histories in their book, "The Mark of Oppression"⁽²⁾.

These studies, and long observations of human relations practitioners, disclose an incidence of certain natural and to-be-expected reactions and attitudes of otherwise normal human beings, who are responding to abnormal experiences and situations to which they are exposed. The crippled, the maimed and the blind undergo many of the same experiences with discrimination, and manifest many of the same reactions, despite the growing concern of society that these minorities be given protection from the painful effects of discrimination. It is likewise true, of the maimed and the blind, as of the ethnic and racial minorities, that perhaps a majority of the group is able to muster reserve strength and an inner sense of security, with which to offset the negative influences. These are able to adjust to conditions, no matter what amount of repression or restraint they must apply to their every thought and action.

To the many who are unable to adjust to these experiences, other choices in the process of accommodating oneself to the restrictions society imposes, become necessary. The choice may be made quite early in life; it usually is done without

(1) Published by The American Council on Education, Wash. D.C., 1942

(2) Published by W. W. Norton, New York, 1951

conscious effort; it frequently is determined by one's temperament, station in life and nature of the experiences encountered. (Personal interpolation) I happen today to be speaking in the community, where years ago, I found myself making my choice, but without the knowledge that I was making a choice.

One, therefore, finds himself (1) consciously and studiously adjusting to the condition over which he feels he has no control, by the exercise of great self-discipline; or (2) he submits to the role in which society has cast him, even though it may mean the sacrifice of his individuality, his incentive, his ambition; or, (3) he resists in one of the several forms which his temperament may dictate. The task of adjusting without relinquishing anything of one's self-respect is a difficult one accomplished by many. Despite the complete absence of statistics on the subject, it is my belief that this group, which finds it possible to adjust, constitutes and has constituted the majority of all the minority groups of the past.

It is impractical to expect that all of the people of any particular group are able to control their emotions and inhibit their actions in times of stress. They who are neither so strong nor self-sufficient will choose to submit to or to resist the influences and pressures to which they are exposed. They who submit, take the line of least resistance. They conclude that to oppose is useless; that to yield to the stronger force and the louder voice is the surest way to biological survival. Their submission cannot be partial or temporary; at least, not for long. The act of submission has an eroding effect upon that which is the substance of man's spirit. First, he acts as a matter of expediency; then, again and again, until self-respect has vanished. With this lost self-respect goes his human aspirations, his ambitions and incentives, leaving him only empty hopes and dreams and the contempt of his contemporaries. Such a person is pointed out by the

majority group as the spiritless, ambitionless example of the basic inferiority of the whole group this individual is supposed to represent. In the Negro world, this is the character referred to contemptuously as "Uncle Tom".

The third choice is found in a response to the urge to Resist. Again, the choice is not consciously made through the process of reasoning; it represents an emotional reaction of the individual, guided by his particular temperament. His glands make the choice for him, but he is as completely committed as though his mental processes were involved. His intellectual capacity, his physical agility or his manual dexterity may help him find gratification, through his response to the urge to Excel. His motivations might find expression in such unconscious urgings; "Study intensively, work industriously, run faster, hit harder; be better than anybody. Prove that you are as good as they, if not better. Achieve! Succeed! If you cannot do these things through healthy, constructive channels, show them anyhow by the kind of symbols of success you can accumulate! Make big money, no matter how! Buy a big house, if they'll let you. Own a big car, flashy clothes, fine furs and jewels. Show them - show them you can do anything they can do!" This admittedly is an unhealthy, impractical kind of demonstration - but remember, their glands, their emotions, are making the choice for them, and the choice is being implemented within the limits of their intellectual, physical and spiritual capacities.

Then, there are those who have learned to fear humiliation and insult - they seek to escape contact. These set up physical and psychological barriers between themselves and that part of the world they fear. These are the scholars hidden in their ivory towers, and the so-called "race leaders" who bury themselves in the ghetto, avoiding contact outside as much as is humanly possible. Within their insular, protected cubicle they may make constructive, though limited, contributions

toward the rebuilding of the self-esteem of members of their race group, but too frequently, also, they are spreading the contagion of racial fear, suspicion and further estrangement. Among these refugees are found the many religious and social cultists. Primitive religion provides the illusion of escape into "other-worldliness". Zoot-suitism and bebop-ism are other cults arising out of the peculiar needs of those wishing to escape from a threatening social order. Members of these latter groups evolve their peculiar standards, their codes of ethics, their mannerisms, their uniform or dress conformity, even their language symbols. "When you cats can't dig their jive, like a square from nowhere", exclusiveness has been established - they belong to something beyond your reach. These cults have their roots in the minority groups of our cities, even though more recently other types of social refugees, the Beat Generation, have appropriated most of the cult symbols to their own use.

Finally, there are those whose choice has been a response to the basic, direct urge to Resist. Our civilization today - the freedoms we of the western world enjoy are the gift of countless generations of dissatisfied persons who elected to resist the forces with which they were dissatisfied. These were and are the rebels, the dissenters, the challengers of all ages. Their value to society depends upon whether their intellect controlled their emotions to the degree that their spirit of revolt could be harnessed constructively. Intelligent, organized, consistent revolt has marked man's every step upward toward the sun, and the original rebels in every culture were the social, economic, religious or political minorities of the day. When they have been successful in the waging of their revolt, history has recorded them as patriots and heroes.

So today, the acid test of the American concepts of democracy and of individual freedom, is whether or not the racial and ethnic minorities of the country may effectively defend themselves from exploitation and unfair treatment at the hands of the majority. Through such instruments of organized resistance as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), each thread of the American mantle of freedom is being tested for its strength and durability, in all kinds of times and circumstances. Through a repetition of these tests, the warp and woof of our system of government is being strengthened. This then is the contribution of minorities whose spirit of rebellion is being harnessed and intelligently directed within the framework of Western law and culture patterns. However, it is the great number of rebels in the minority group world who have neither restraint, self-discipline or intelligent direction, who are your clients and constant headaches; and who may help you form a distorted opinion of entire groups of people because of this constant and one-sided exposure. These are the people whose frustration and rage bring the primitive response of resisting - directly, impulsively, angrily, blindly, and in what they feel is in a retaliatory vein.

First of all is the impulse to reject largely or completely, the ethics, morals, rules and laws by which the majority presumes to guide its conduct. Whereas in the larger world, conformity is an expression of effective social control; nonconformity, to them, becomes a guiding principle. If quiet speech is the mark of a gentleman, then they show contempt by speaking loudly; if politeness and courtesy are desirable traits, then they have a compulsion to be crude and rude. In such manner do they show their displeasure with their lot; express their rejection of those who have rejected them. Cynicism becomes a way of life, starting with teen-agers, because terms like "belief" and "faith" are illusions, and luxuries in which only

the strong may indulge. Excessive drinking, gambling and fighting provide momentary release from the frustration and rage which consume them, and their unfortunate encounters with officers of the law cause them to look upon police as oppressors and enemies.

These are manifestations to be observed in the minority group world, to a disproportionate degree. To Submit or to Resist - and, in the course of adopting one of the substituted for the basic human desire for belongingness - to Excel, Repel or Rebel. As stated before and repeated here for emphasis, these are the natural expressions of otherwise normal people, who have yielded to the impact of abnormal conditions and situations. These too, are the manifestations which are singled out by the critic of the minority, as things representing racial or ethnic characteristics - signs of the supposed innate difference or inferiority of the minority in question.

The picture of law enforcement in minority group communities has not been a pleasant one. We have seen repeatedly the beginning and the perpetuating of a vicious cycle where minority group expressions such as we have just reviewed, have been misread and misinterpreted by police officials, whose summary and oft-times impatient treatment of the group members has deepened and broadened their suspicions, fear and hostility; this in turn, bringing even sterner police measures. Intelligence, reason, training and logic are not exhibited in such situations. Confidence is the element so sadly needed if the cycle ever is to be reversed, and a practical and effective law enforcement procedure be employed. It is we who have the leadership responsibility to seek the establishment of confidence, and the specialists' knowledge with which to meet the challenge. This specialists' knowledge must be a demonstrated, tested knowledge, rather than the beliefs and opinions which come through rumor and the blind acceptance of ill-founded customs and

practices. The general public is constantly reminded that ignorance of the law is no excuse, when the law enforcement officer apprehends a naive violator. With equal emphasis it may be said, with respect to the statistical predictability of human reaction, that ignorance of these laws of human behavior is no excuse for the officer who would wish to achieve professional status.

Law enforcement procedures in today's tense world, requires a knowledge and a sensitivity that permits a feeling of the community pulse; that bestows the ability to note signs of majority group acts of aggression which are sure to invite reprisal; that provides an awareness of minority group motivations and temper. It is this kind of sensitivity that makes it possible for police to assess the meaning of small and isolated incidents which indicate underlying tensions, any one of which may trigger the big explosion. In truth, broader human relations understanding is an assurance of more effective law enforcement in the American community.